

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MANILA 02906 01 OF 02 070640Z

11

ACTION EA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1135

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 2906

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF FEB 27 REFERENDUM

SUMMARY: IN FEB 27 REFERENDUM, PRESIDENT MARCOS OBTAINED OVERWHELMING APPROVAL OF HIS EXERCISE OF MARTIAL LAW POWERS AND STRONG SUPPORT FOR HIS APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL OFFICIALS AND PLAN TO RESTRUCTURE THE GOVERNMENT OF METRO-MANILA. THE REFERENDUM FULFILLED MARCOS' COMMITMENT TO CONSULT ANNUALLY WITH THE POPULACE AND IN PRESIDENT'S EYES LEGITIMIZES HIS CONTINUATION IN POWER AND OBJECTIVES HE SETS FOR NATION. IN ADDITION TO SATISFYING MARCOS' LEGALISTIC INTERESTS, REFERENDUM REASSERTED HIS CONTROL OVER THE POPULACE AND DEMONSTRATED NATIONAL STABILITY. IT ALSO REVEALED THE REGIME'S AUTHORITARIAN AND ONE-MAN BASIS. EMPHASIS ON REFERENDUM'S CONSULTATIVE FUNCTION SUGGESTS PRESIDENT IS PREPARED TO POSTPONE PARLIAMENTARY FORM OF GOVERNMENT INDEFINITELY IN FAVOR OF PERIODIC REFERENDA, REFERENDUM AND PRE-REFERENDUM PERIOD GAVE MARCOS MEASURE OF POPULAR MOOD AND NO DOUBT REINFORCED HIS VIEWS ON MALLEABILITY OF POPULACE. STILL REFERENDUM MAY HAVE FOCUSED POLITIC-
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PAGE 02 MANILA 02906 01 OF 02 070640Z

ITY OF POPULACE. STILL REFERENDUM MAY HAVE FOCUSED POLITIC-

ALLY AWARE ELEMENTS' ATTENTION ON NATION'S LONG TERM PROSPECTS AND PROVIDED THEM OPPORTUNITY DISCUSS THESE WITH LIKE MINDED CITIZENS. MARCOS' ABILITY TO APPOINT ALL LOCAL OFFICIALS WILL SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE HIS POWER BY GUARANTEEING THAT ONLY MARCOS LOYALISTS CONTROL LOCAL GOVERNMENT, BUT NOT MANY CHANGES EXPECTED. APPOINTMENT POWER AT SAME TIME MAKES HIM DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS WHICH MAY NOT RESPOND FAVORABLY TO INCREASING CENTRALIZATION. REFERENDUM UNLIKELY TO HAVE CONVINCED FOREIGN OBSERVERS OR DOMESTIC CRITICS OF GENUINELY DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN THE PHILIPPINES. IT IS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE TO WHAT EXTENT (IF ANY) REFERENDUM SATISFIED POPULAR ASPIRATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS. ITS PRIMARY SIGNIFICANCE IS THAT MARCOS WANTED IT AND IS SATISFIED IT LEGITIMIZES HIS CONTINUATION IN POWER AND WHATEVER PROGRAMS HE MAY PLAN FOR NATION. ALTHOUGH HE HAS SUGGESTED REFERENDUM WOULD BE DESIDERATUM FOR MOVING ON VARIOUS PROGRAMS SUCH AS AFP REORGANIZATION AND MUSLIM REBELLION, MAIN PURPOSE OF REFERENDUM HAS BEEN TO REINFORCE STATUS QUO. END SUMMARY.

1. COMELEC HAS TABULATED 76 PERCENT OF THE 23.3 MILLION VOTES. UNOFFICIAL PROJECTIONS INDICATE PRES MARCOS WILL OBTAIN OVER 90 PERCENT SUPPORT FOR BOTH HIS EXERCISE OF MARTIAL LAW POWERS AND HIS CONTINUING TO EXERCISE THESE POWERS. OUTSIDE THE METRO-MANILA AREA, 80.2 PERCENT FAVORED PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL OFFICIALS INSTEAD OF ELECTIONS. IN MANILA APPROXIMATELY 60 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS OPTED FOR THE CITY MANAGER/COMMISSION FORM OF GOVERNMENT THE PRESIDENT ADVOCATED. TEN PERCENT ABSTAINED AND THE REMAINING 30 PERCENT APPROVED. GOVERNMENT ESTIMATES TURNOUT AT APPROXIMATELY 90 PERCENT OF THOSE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE. WE ARE INCLINED TO TAKE THIS AND PREVIOUS FIGURES WITH CONSIDERABLE GRAIN OF SALT. SITUATION IN SOUTH ALONE WOULD SEEM PRECLUDE KING OF TURNOUT GOVERNMENT CLAIMING. FACT THAT PEACE AND ORDER SITUATION PROBABLY INTERFERED WITH VOTING MAKES IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE EXACT NUMBERS OF VOTERS WHO BOYCOTTED REFERENDUM.

2. MOST LOCAL OFFICIALS PROBABLY DID ALL THEY COULD IN THEIR AREAS TO PRODUCE RESULT MARCOS WANTED. IN TABULATING

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MANILA 02906 01 OF 02 070640Z

FINAL RESULTS, COMELEC CAN ENSURE THESE MATCH MARCOS' EXPECTATIONS. WHILE REFERENDUM UNDOUBTEDLY RIGGED, WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK GOVERNMENT WILL NOT HAVE TO DO A GREAT DEAL OF MANIPULATING OF FINAL RESULTS. MOST OF THOSE WHO VOTED APPRECIATED THEY HAD NO REAL CHOICE AND PROBABLY PREFERRED NOT TO ANTAGONIZE AUTHORITIES DURING THE ACTUAL BALLOTING BY VOTING "NO" ALTHOUGH THEY MAY HAVE PRIVATELY VOICED CRITICISM. THOUGH PRESIDENT SAID BOYCOTT MOVEMENT

"FIZZLED," PRESS ATTENTION TO IT AS WELL AS REPORTS OF BLANK BALLOTS LEND AIR OF CREDIBILITY TO EXERCISE. WE ARE NOT FULLY CLEAR ON SIGNIFICANCE OF BOYCOTT MOVEMENT OR NEGATIVE VOTE BUT WE SUSPECT MARCOS WAS GREATLY RELIEVED THAT IT TURNED OUT TO LESS THAN HE HAD FEARED.

3. REFERENDUM FULFILLS AND INSTITUTIONALIZES MARCOS COMMITMENT TO SOME KIND OF NATIONAL CONSULTATION EVERY YEAR. ALTHOUGH HE FOUND IT POLITICALLY ADVISABLE TO POSTPONE THE SEPT 1, 1974 PULONG, HE ADHERED TO COMMITMENT TO HOLD CONSULTATION LATER, ALBEIT IN FAR MORE ANTISEPTIC FORM. WE BELIEVE PRESIDENT'S FUNDAMENTAL INTEREST IN REFERENDUM STEMS FRT.)3&-)8 58: 543-(). HE HAS CONSEQUENTLY VIEWED THE REFERENDUM AS A JURIDICAL VEHICLE FOR LEGITIMIZING HIS CONTINUED EXERCISE OF POWER. REFERENDUM RESULTS ALSO PROVIDED RATIONALE HE NEEDS FOR AVOIDING TWO POTENTIAL HEADACHES BY (A) NOT CALLING CONSTITUTIONALLY-DECREED INTERIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND (B) NOT CALLING LOCAL ELECTIONS AT THE END OF 1975. AT SAME TIME, REFERENDUM REASSERTED MARCOS' CONTROL OVER THE POPULATION AND DEMONSTRATED REGIME'S STABILITY, ESPECIALLY TO INTENDED TARGET OF FOREIGN INVESTORS.

4. WHATEVER ITS MERITS OR DEMERITS, REFERENDUM HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AS MARCOS' CHOSEN CONSULTATIVE PROCEDURE, THEREBY POSTPONING PROSPECTS FOR PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD. MARCOS' DECISION, WHICH PERSONIFIES INTENTION OF INDIVIDUAL RULE, COULD INCREASE OPPOSITION ABROAD AND POSSIBLY SPUR OPPOSITION AT HOME, ALTHOUGH LIKELIHOOD OF CONCERTED ACTION HERE ON SO BROAD AN ISSUE SEEMS CURRENTLY REMOTE. IT MAY ALSO CONVINCE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AS WELL AS MEMBERS OF US CONGRESS THAT DEMOCRACY (PARLIAMENTARY OR OTHERWISE) IS FINISHED IN THE PHILIPPINES. WE ASSUME MARCOS ANTICIPATED THAT OPTING FOR CONSTITUTIONAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MANILA 02906 01 OF 02 070640Z

AUTHORITARIANISM COULD BRING CRITICISM BUT HE EVIDENTLY IS NOT INCLINED TO LET IT SAWY HIM FROM WHAT HE THINKS IS NECESSARY. (RESPONDING SOMEWHAT HUMOUROUSLY TO NEEDLING QUESTION AT MAR. 1 PRESS CONFERENCE, MARCOS OBSERVED THAT PERHAPS PHILIPPINES SHOULD INVESTIGATE WHETHER AMERICAN SYSTEM SUITS AMERICAN PEOPLE.)

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 MANILA 02906 02 OF 02 070700Z

11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 2906

5. PREPARATIONS FOR AND ACTUAL PERFORMANCE IN REFERENDUM ALSO ENABLED PRESIDENT MAKE SOUNDINGS OF POPULAR MOOD. WHILE HE SEEMED SURPRISED BY STRONG FEELINGS ON THE ELECTION OF LOCAL OFFICIALS ISSUE IN PLACES LIKE CEBY CITY AND TOOK GREAT UMBRAGE AT CHURCH ACTIVISTS, REFERENDUM ON WHOLE PROBABLY REINFORCED PRESIDENT'S VIEWS ON HIS ABILITY TO CONTROL AND MANIPULATE PHILIPPINE CITIZENRY. AT SAME TIME, IT ENABLED HIM TO BETTER TO IDENTIFY OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, ESPECIALLY WITHIN CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND TO TEST DIVISIVE TACTICS AIMED AT FRAGMENTING THE OPPOSITION. HE CAN ALWAYS DRAW ON THIS KNOWLEDGE IN ANY FUTURE CONFRONTATION WITH CHURCH BUT IN VIEW OF FEEBLENESS OF OPPOSITION, WE THINK IT MORE PROBABLE HE WILL ADOPT "LET BYGONES BE BYGONES" ATTITUDE. FIRST TEST OF PRESIDENTIAL MOOD LIKELY TO BE MADE IN HANDLING BY COMELEC OF NON-PARTICIPANTS, WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO COME IN AND EXPLAIN WHY THEY FAILED TO VOTE. WE WOULD EXPECT HE WOULD ULTIMATELY AMNESTY THOSE WHO BOYCOTTED REFERENDUM AFTER CHIDING THEM FOR LACK OF PATRIOTISM. ALTHOUGH HE COULD CONCEIVABLY CAPITALIZE ON REFERENDUM "TRIUMPH" BY SENDING ABROAD MILITANT OPPOSITION FIGURES, PERHAPS EVEN INCLUDING AQUINO, WE DOUBT HE HAS REALLY THOUGHT THIS FAR WITH REFERENCE TO UNDOING HIS OPPOSITION.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MANILA 02906 02 OF 02 070700Z

(MARCOS APPEARS UNPERTURBED BY THE OPPOSITION OF OLD SOCIETY STALWARTS SUCH AS SENATORS SALONGA AND TANADA WHOM HE CONSTANTLY CITES AS PROOF THERE IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN

PHILIPPINES.)

6. WHILE REFERENDUM PROBABLY REINFORCED PRESIDENT'S VIEWS ON MALLEABILITY OF POPULACE, PREPARATION FOR AND CONDUCT OF REFERENDUM MAY ALSO HAVE STIMULATED HEADY, COLLECTIVE SENSE OF OPPOSITION. PUBLIC WAS GIVEN SURPRISING EXPOSURE TO LIKES OF LIBERAL PARTY CHAIRMAN SENATOR ROXAS, SOC RODRIGO, FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE CONCEPCION WHO CAME OUT OF HIBERNATION FOR BRIEF PERIOD OF "FREE DEBATE" AND ALSO EXPOSED TO DEFINATE BEHAVIOR OF ACTIVISTS, PRIMARILY RELIGIOUS, WHO DARED ACT CONTRARY TO GOVERNMENT INJUNCTIONS. ALTHOUGH FILIPINO ADEPT AT APPLAUDING OTHER'S ACTIVITIES WHILE CAREFULLY AVOIDING HIS OWN EXPOSURE TO OR IDENTIFICATION WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES, HE COULD NOT HAVE MISSED APPEARANCE OF CONTINUUM FROM ARCHBISHOP'S PRAYER VIGIL IN SEPTEMBER TO OPPOSITIONIST ACTIVITIES IN REFERENDUM. SUM TOTAL OF SENSE OF OPPOSITION AFTER REPEAT AFTER REFERENDUM MAY NOT AMOUNT TO HILL OF BEANS; CERTAINLY NO ORGANIZED AND COMPREHENSIVE OPPOSITION HAS YET COME ON SCENE. NEVERTHELESS BEANS COULD SPROUT NEW DOUBTS AND IN TIME PROMOTE GREATER COHESIVENESS AMONG CRITICS CONCERNED OVER LONG TERM PROSPECTS OF PHILIPPINES.

7. OBTAINING RIGHT FOR PRESIDENT TO CHOOSE LOCAL OFFICIALS SHOULD SIMPLIFY GOVERNMENT'S OPERATING PROCEDURES. HE CAN NOW RETAIN OR APPOINT THESE OFFICIALS AS HE WISHES; REMOVE POOR PERFORMERS; AND AVOID THE DIVISIVENESS AND OPPOSITION LOCAL ELECTIONS MIGHT HAVE GENERATED. WE DOUBT NOW THAT HE INTENDS TO MAKE MANY CHANGES SINCE PRIMARY CRITERION APPEARS TO BE LOYALTY AND WE ASSUME HE DOES NOT WISH TO BE BURDENED AT THIS TIME WITH TASK OF RESTAFFING HUNDREDS OF POSITIONS. HE HAS REITERATED THAT PERFORMANCE IS BEING AUDITED SO WE DO EXPECT SOME CHANGES. HAVING ACQUIRED THIS RIGHT, HOWEVER, HE WILL NOW BEAR THE EXCLUSIVE BLAME FOR POOR LOCAL PERFORMANCE. IT IS POSSIBLE, IN FACT, THAT FURTHER CENTRALIZATION OF POWER COULD CONTRIBUTE TO WEAKENING LOCAL PERFORMANCE. WITH REFERENCE TO APPROVAL HE HAS OBTAINED FOR RESTRUCTURING GOVERNMENT OF METRO-MANILA, THE PRESIDENT INCREASES HIS HOLD

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MANILA 02906 02 OF 02 070700Z

OVER CAPITAL, WHICH HE REGARDS AS ESSENTIAL TO HIS OWN PERSONAL AMBITIONS. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE, HOWEVER, CITY MANAGER SYSTEM WILL PROVIDE BETTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MANILA SINCE GOP HAS ALMOST NO EXPERIENCE IN THIS SYSTEM AND OBVIOUSLY HAS NOT EVEN STUDIED PHILOSOPHY OR MECHANICS OF IT FOR MANILA. MARCOS, OF COURSE, IDENTIFIES HIMSELF EVEN MORE CLOSELY WITH PERFORMANCE OF THOSE HE APPOINTS TO MANILA GOVERNMENT. SINCE 1973 CONSTITUTION REQUIRES PLEBISCITE ON CHANGE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, METRO-MANILA VOTERS WILL PROBABLY PARTICIPATE IN PLEBISCITE EARLY NEXT YEAR TO APPROVE PRESIDENT'S FINAL

BLUEPRINT FOR METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT.

8. IN MARCOS' CALCULUS, THE ADVANTAGES OF THE REFERENDUM CLEARLY OUTWEIGHED THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS AND POTENTIAL FOR PROBLEMS. BASED ON HIS "NEW MANDATE," THE PRESIDENT CAN, IF HE WISHES, TAKE A MORE ACTIVIST ROLE. HE MET WITH HIS CABINET (ALL OF WHOM TENDERED THEIR COURTESY RESIGNATIONS) MARCH 1 TO DISCUSS IMPLEMENTATION OF "THE MANDATE OF THE PEOPLE." HE SPOKE OF CLOSER PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTION TO THE MUSLIM REBELLION, ARMED FORCES REORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENTAL CORRUPTION AND INEFFICIENCY. HE CAN EMBARK ON WHATEVER PROGRAM HE HAS IN MIND SECURE IN THE FACT THAT THE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MARSHALLED BEHIND HIM. DESPITE THIS BALLYHOO OF NEW BEGINNINGS, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE REFERENDUM IN MARCOS' MIND HAS BEEN TO JUSTIFY HIS CONTINUATION IN POWER. PROGRAM FOCUS OF REFERENDUM PER SE WAS ALWAYS MARGINAL.

9. IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER THE REFERENDUM SATISFIED ANY POPULAR ASPIRATIONS. THE PRIMARY FACT IS MARCOS THOUGHT IT WAS DESIRABLE AND NECESSARY AND THAT IT SATISFIES HIS LEGALISTIC DESIRES FOR LEGITIMACY. HE CAN ALSO USE REFERENDUM TO CONFOUND HIS CRITICS ABROAD BUT HE REMAINS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT REFLECTS ON HIS LEGITIMACY. REFERENDUM HAS CLEARLY BUOYED THE PRESIDENT'S SPIRITS AND INCREASED HIS CONFIDENCE. NEVERTHELESS, IT ACCENTUATES THE ONE-MAN NATURE OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND HIGHLIGHTS LACK OF NEW SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS AND SUCCESSION PROBLEM.
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